



# MONTHLY MAY 2005 UPDATE

## ◆ MDOD initiatives focus on transitioning youth

MDOD's **Secretary Kristen Cox** kicked off a day-long conference on transitioning youth with a **keynote address** stressing the need for high expectations.

The Third Annual Project Access Conference, held April 15 at Howard Community College, attracted parents, educators and service providers and tackled subjects such as helping youth with disabilities develop needed social skills to be successful in college, developing individualized career plans, and accessing useful technology.

"We want to make sure that students have all the tools they need to succeed," said Cox, while cautioning against doing too much. "We have to help students set goals, problem solve and deal with the consequences of the choices they make. Kids need to learn to advocate for themselves. This forces them to take responsibility for their choices – they're not victims of their circumstances."

Cox said progress has been made in the number of high school students with disabilities who are going on to college — the number tripling over the past three decades. The problem, she said, is that many students are not as successful as they might be once they arrive because they are not prepared for the transition.

**Two current initiatives by the Maryland Department of Disabilities** will deal directly with this issue. On April 29 at Hagerstown Community College, the Department held the first meeting for **Disabilities Support Service Providers** from community colleges from across the state. The goal of this meeting and others that will follow is to **develop guidelines** to be presented to community college presidents, some of whom are acutely aware of the issue and others who may not, as yet, have it on their radar screens.

The other initiative involves **legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly** this year mandating the creation of a **Community College Students with Disabilities Task Force**. The task force, which will begin its work this July, is a joint initiative between the Maryland Department of Disabilities and the state's Commission on Higher Education.

The goals of the Task Force are to: identify programmatic and physical barriers for students with disabilities; identify gaps in resources for technology, equipment and services; develop strategies to improve educational and employment outcomes for students with disabilities; and develop a series of recommendations that will result in Maryland community colleges having the resources to actively serve students with disabilities. The task force will report its findings and **recommendations to Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. and the General Assembly by Dec. 1, 2005.**

For further information about these initiatives and upcoming meeting dates, call **Jade Gingerich**, MDOD's **Director of Employment Policy**, at 410-767-3651.



◆ Empowering People ◆

## Maryland Relay Users to Benefit from FCC-Launched Initiative

Through the efforts of the **Ehrlich-Steele Administration**, Maryland Relay has announced it is the first state relay center in the nation to be enrolled in the FCC's Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP) Program. Maryland Relay is the telecommunications system that provides telephone access between citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled and those who do not have a disability.

The FCC established the TSP Program in 1988 to prioritize the restoration of telephone service to critical facilities and agencies at times when

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Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor ~ Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor ~ Kristen Cox, Secretary ~ Diane McComb, Deputy Secretary

## ◆ MDOD 2005 Legislative Wrap-Up

The 2005 legislative session of the **Maryland General Assembly** overall was a **strong year for disability issues**. Community advocates worked diligently on a number of issues, and the disability community has numerous successes to show for it. Here are some highlights.

### Budget Approved

**Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.** proposed another strong budget for disability programs, most of which was approved without cuts. The Governor also presented two supplemental budgets which increased funding for transitioning youth and juvenile services. The legislature incorporated budget language to reverse the demise of the **Rare and Expensive Case Management (REM)** program, giving it one more year without changes.

For the first time, **\$4 million** was allocated to implement the **Medicaid Buy-In**, providing the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to be employed and retain their eligibility for Medicaid benefits. This will allow many individuals with disabilities to join the workforce or increase their level of employment without fearing the loss of medical benefits they receive through Medicaid and helping alleviate their dependence on cash assistance programs.

A **10 percent increase** in funding was approved in the **Medical Assistance Personal Care (MAPC)** program to boost the wages paid to **personal care attendants**. For some providers, this will be the first increase since 1983. In a tough budget year, this increase confirms the Administration's commitment to the direct support workforce assisting people with disabilities who choose to live in their communities.

The **Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Wage Initiative** was **fully funded**, as was transitioning youth services for youngsters leaving special education programs. Also, funds were included in the capital program of the **Maryland Department of Transportation** for the purchase of **100 to 125 fully-accessible vehicles** each year over the next six years, resulting in a fully-accessible fixed-route capacity.

### Legislation Passed

A number of **bills significant to the disability community** were passed by the State Legislature during the 2005 session (HB refers to House Bill and SB to Senate Bill). Among them:

- The Ehrlich Administration sponsored HB251 to amend Maryland's lead law with the goal of eliminating childhood lead poisoning in the State by 2010.
- On Our Own of Maryland applauded the passage of HB990 which reinstates Medicaid benefits to individuals who leave state institutions without the current delay.
- HB309/SB395 establishes in statute the State Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board.
- HB794 requires that written plans be developed for each person residing in a state residential center.
- HB988/SB776 gives individuals with developmental disabilities additional rights and services to strengthen informed choice provisions.
- HB1142/SB360 assures blind individuals equal access to information technology, such as online classes and research at state universities.
- SB630 codifies the recommendations of the prior year's task force on Parking for Individuals with Disabilities.
- HB1542 establishes an on-going advisory committee in the Maryland Department of Disabilities to look at issues of compensation, training, referral and registry requirements for personal care workers in various attendant care programs.
- SB191 assures that individuals with disabilities under the age of 65 who purchase Medi-Gap insurance policies cannot be charged a higher rate for a Medicare Supplement Plan A policy than the rate charged by the carrier to other individuals in the same county.
- HB1236 establishes a Task Force on Community College Students with Disabilities to be co-chaired by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and MDOD, along with the Association of Community Colleges.

## ◆ Maryland Relay Users

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telecommunications repair companies are overburdened with service requests. The program presently restores telephone services most critical to national and homeland security on a priority basis in the event of a national crisis or emergency. Recently, the FCC has partnered with the Department of Homeland Security to increase TSP participation.

With the program successfully implemented here, Maryland Relay users will be able to make and receive calls during emergencies. When service is disrupted, the Baltimore-based Maryland Relay now is assured that it will receive full attention for priority restoration before any non-TSP service.

"Relay facilities are essential in ensuring reliable, effective communication between people with hearing and speech disabilities and emergency services or other people," said **Brenda Kelly-Frey, director of Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM)**, a public service provided by the Ehrlich-Steele administration. "In the event of a disaster, it's vital that all appropriate steps be taken to ensure that service to relay centers is restored as soon as possible."

For more information, visit [www.mdrelay.org](http://www.mdrelay.org) or contact **Nancy Seidman, Public Relations Coordinator with Maryland Relay**, at **410-767-6962** or [seidma@dbm.state.md.us](mailto:seidma@dbm.state.md.us).



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